Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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You Think the Highland Clearances Were Bad?

Why the Avant Garde Moved to Brooklyn

By Forrest Hylton

"When a global history of the clearance tactics and police terror that accompanied neoliberal structural adjustment is written, stories of neighborhoods like Bushwick in Brooklyn will have to be included alongside Rocinha in Rio or Manrique in Medellín." So writes Forrest Hylton here. We devote the whole of this issue to Hylton's riveting history of what the Rockefellers, the think tanks, Roger Starr and the New York Times did to New York over the last generation. AC / JSC

On the corner of Starr Street and Wyckoff Avenue in the northern Brooklyn neighborhood of Bushwick, not long ago, a restaurant that did not serve food was in need of "waitresses" – the word in quote marks in the handwritten Spanish-language sign in the window. Like other windows, it was covered by white curtains, even during the day. At night, along with the occasional Puerto Rican, some of the neighborhood's recent arrivals – Dominican, Mexican, and Ecuadorian men – drank beer, shot pool, and, in dim light and shadows, listened to *rancheras, corridos, boleros, bachatas, salsa romántica, musica norteña,* or *merengues* at ear-shattering volume on the juke box. Some held waitresses, like Brenda *la hondureña*, close as they slow-danced. Some consumed narcotics on the premises with minimal discretion, but they were not sold; prostitutes entered, left, and worked the sidewalk, but not the floor. It was a flagrant example of what Colombians call *una oficina*: a "business office".

Down the block past the Chinese import-export warehouse, at the corner of Wyckoff and Troutman, another restaurant, opened in late 2005, was back-lit by candles, with wood-paneled walls and wooden tables and benches, against the background of sharp, anxious noise, characteristic of white, middle-class renters and aspiring property owners, many of them workers in the culture industry. The restaurant serves red wine, carrot-parsnip soup, and B.L.T.'s with no-nitrate bacon, and balsamic mayonnaise. In the middle of the block, a newly rehabilitated building, owned, developed and managed by the neighborhood's only not-for-profit housing agency flew a banner advertising Mayor Mike Bloomberg's "New Housing Marketplace". By fall 2006, on the first floor, the building featured an upscale, bustling coffee shop for the new demographic. After being closed down briefly in late June 2006, the "restaurant" on the corner of Starr and Wyckoff went semi-legit, with bright lights, curtains pulled back, a menu, and waitresses who served food rather than danced. Then the owner of the restaurant, who also owned the coffee shop, bought them out.

When, on March 5, 2005, the *New York Times Magazine* ran an article headlined: "Pssst…Have You Heard About Bushwick? How An Undesirable Neighborhood Becomes the Next Hot Spot," it was merely flying yet another advertising banner for local real estate. By spring 2006, this was all old news, at least for *Village Voice* readers: "By now you've surely heard the hype, but even a 'Sunday Styles' article can't spoil this Brooklyn area's innate charm." This charm was said to consist of "giant lofts that can hold a bunch of friends (and their turntables)," combined with "traditional housing stock," making for a mix "that adds up to a pretty cool vibe."

Bushwick is situated along a two square-mile area of the northeastern border of Brooklyn. Along a long stretch of Bushwick and Irving Avenues, past Gates toward Cypress Cemeteries, sit mansions that architects of note built for industrial capitalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The houses that remain are relicts from a time when Brooklyn, especially Bushwick/Williamsburg, was the brewing capital of the Northeast. Newly arrived German immigrants began to organize production for the local market in the 1850s, and Samuel Liebmann, a Jewish "Red 48er," established what, under the direction of his sons, would become Rheingold, the city's leading beer. When the Lexington Ave. El train arrived in 1885, property values rose, and a speculative building boom ensued. By 1890, Brewers' Row had twelve breweries in a twelve-block radius, and Bushwick's Amphion Theater, a vaudeville house that seated 2,000, was the nation's first to feature electric lights.

By the 1950s, Bushwick had become an Italian-American stronghold, with gangland killings outside of prominent restaurants, but as Italian, German, and Irish families fled toward neighboring Ridgewood and Long Island, African Americans, West Indians, and Puerto Ricans began to take their places, buying homes at elevated prices, or, more likely, moving into apartments with newly-raised rents. Block by block, the neighborhood went from being a solidly white working-class neighborhood, to being black and brown with a similar class composition. In spite of its vibrant block associations, solid schools, and neighborhood improvement projects, white flight led the City Planning

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Commission to re-classify Bushwick as a slum. For new African American and Puerto Rican migrants, discrimination in housing was even more flagrant than in employment.

The postwar achievements of New York's working class, so the historian Joshua Freeman reminds us, should not be forgotten or underestimated. What made them possible was the unprecedented surge of working-class mobilization after World War II, when labor's no-strike pledge ended. For the majority that did not own property, the American Labor Party's successful fight to extend wartime rent control put the working class at the heart of the city. Union-run health centers, plus health benefits from employers, preventive medicine, group practice, and prepaid, not fee-for-service care, fell under partial control of unions through the late 1960s. This was coupled with the unionization of black and Puerto Rican health care workers by the Service Employees' International Union, local 1199, in the same decade. New York's working class had access to the nation's best public housing, schools and universities, culture and arts.

More so in New York than anywhere else in the U.S., the left, centered in the Communist Party, had "real autonomy from liberal control" (see Freeman's *Working-Class New York*), not least through its cultural and ideological organs. This made the city a decisive front in capital's war to impose social democracy as the outer limit of the possible. The crushing of the communist movement – and of radicalism beyond the Cold War consensus – led to the death of a vision of what a different society might look like and, consequently, to *de facto* acceptance of corporate-government leadership, led by bankers and real estate developers, captained by David and Nelson Rockefeller.

Between 1945 and 1970, more than a million whites in the region became suburbanites along the lines promoted by private developers and the government after the 1930s. More than a million African Americans and Puerto Ricans moved in to take their place. Along with black and Hispanic insurgent movements, working-class mobilization, especially among municipal workers, enlarged the size and scope of the city's welfare spending, as did an aging population. The combination of these forces, along with the planned obsolescence of industrial manufacturing at the hands of bankers and real estate developers led by the Rockefeller brothers – 600,000 manufacturing jobs were eliminated by design between 1969 and 1977 – led to high unemployment and lowered city revenues, at the same time as social welfare demands increased.

Like state and federal governments, by the late 1960s city government found its authority eroded by organized labor – led by Jews and "white ethnics" – and African American and Puerto Rican municipal workers. The social democratic pact had begun to come apart nationwide, with organized labor opting for direct action in the form of wildcat strikes in public as well as the private sector – nowhere more so than in New York City. Sanitation workers walked out in 1968, and in 1970 the city's postal workers inspired a nationwide wildcat led by the rank and file. They fought for, and won, higher wages and control of their work. In 1971, 4.2 million workdays were lost to strikes, more than double the 1970 figure.

On organized labor's left, insurgent movements led by young blacls and Puerto Ricans challenged government to take responsibility for improving jobs, education, housing, and healthcare in their neighborhoods. In line with community demands, they organized their own social programs and services in the absence of, or alongside, state programs.

This spurred the counter-mobilization known as backlash. Mounting anti-drug hysteria was instrumental to the assault on "minority" communities that formed the majority of the population in urban centers. The new crime bill, the war on drugs, and legislation that facilitated grand jury investigations into alleged conspiracies decimated the leading organizations demanding better jobs, health, housing, and services. Young blacks and Hispanics suffered the brunt of the onslaught.

Slash-and-Burn Urbanism

This was the context in which Mayor John Lindsay gave the RAND Institute a mandate to find ways to save on city spending in general, and fire services in particular. Based on computer model simulations, in 1969 the Rand Fire Project released a study about saving money by cutting fire spending in "high-incidence" areas of the city, which, as the study noted, were largely black and Puerto Rican.

1968 was a banner year for arson and abandonment, as landlords had no incentive to maintain buildings in neighborhoods with frequent fires and falling property values. The arson-abandonment cycle spread dramatically enough for officials to know about it by 1970. In line with the recommendations of the RAND study, however, resources with which to fight it were cut. Across the city, between 20,000 and 60,000 housing units were abandoned each year between 1965 and 1975, an ever-increasing number to arson. Public services were slashed, and fire spread throughout the Bronx, upper Manhattan, and what was known as the "poverty belt" – Williamsburg, Bushwick, Ocean Hill, Brownsville, East New York – in northern Brooklyn. The peak of the fire-abandonment epidemic was 1974-77 – years that saw the steepest service cuts.

The thing to understand is that by its very nature fire spreads exponentially, such that in fighting fires every minute of response time counts. While the initial flame grows gradually, once it reaches a certain size, it metastasizes at frightful speed. When RAND-inspired cuts eliminated 10 per cent of the city's fire companies, reduced the number of companies responding to alarms, lowered staffing levels on those that remained, and introduced new electric voice fire boxes to replace the older electro-magnetic ones, they lengthened response time enough to make fire in a single building contagious for an entire block.

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Since fire response was severed from its previous link to fire company workload, RAND's policies acted as "finishers" of whole neighborhoods, even boroughs, on a scale that dwarfed the mafia and its hired hands. Between 1970 and 1980, 1.3 million white people left the city, and some 600,000 blacks and Latinos were displaced within it, particularly in Brooklyn and the Bronx. These metrics recalled the ones used by RAND to measure the effects of counterinsurgency in Indo-China. This carefully calculated exercise in mass ethnic and class cleansing is detailed in Deborah and Rodrick Wallace' brilliant book, *A Plague on Your Houses*.

An American Answer to Baron Haussmann

Roger Starr was among the first crop of neoconservative think-tank intellectuals conscious of the importance of ideas and ideology in politics. A product of Yale, veteran of the OSS in World War II (Asian theater), by 1959 Starr led the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council, the principal lobbying and planning group for the real estate caste in New York City. With the leading family of developers in the outer boroughs, Starr helped establish the Pratt Institute of Architecture and Design, where he taught during the 1960s.

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Starr conceived of neighborhoods in terms of "natural" cycles: they are born, develop, age, and die. In a 1966 treatise, he led a frontal assault on liberal nostrums, particularly "communities," which, being "essentially superficial and highly mobile," could be "disassembled and reconstituted as easily as railway cars", provided "homogeneity of social class and income" were maintained. Starr argued that the only sensible policy to adopt toward "dying" neighborhoods – where poor people lived – was to kill them off so they could be re-born.

Something had to be done to disorganize poor black and Hispanic communities in order to redevelop them in line with a new economic model based on the deliberate destruction of the industrial manufacturing economy; expansion of central business districts and the building of government-subsidized office towers; the gentrification of neighborhoods closest to the central business districts, like Park Slope, Tribeca, and Greenwich Village; sharp reductions in investment in public housing, parks, libraries, schools, sanitation, hospitals, transport; and new luxury housing projects, subsidized by the state and municipal government.

New York's "fiscal crisis" in 1975 provided neoconservatives – beginning with Treasury Secretary Charles Simon – with the means with which to attack organized labor, gut the welfare state, and criminalize the poor. In the thick of the crisis, the bankers, financiers, developers, and their conservative ideologues made an audacious grab for power. Mayor Abraham Beame appointed Roger Starr head of Housing and Development Administration. Starr caused an outcry at a meeting of the real estate lodge of the B'nai B'rith when he declared that through "planned shrinkage" the city should "accelerate the drainage," i.e., stop people – blacks and Puerto Ricans – from migrating in search of manufacturing jobs that no longer existed. As Starr put it in an article in the *New York Times Magazine*, "our urban system is based on the theory of taking the peasant and turning him into a proletarian. Why not keep him a peasant?" Blacks and Puerto Ricans should be encouraged to migrate elsewhere in order that their neighborhoods might "lie fallow until a change in economic and demographic assumptions makes the land useful once again".

So Starr advised the city to follow the lead of capital and leave sick and dying neighborhoods to their destiny, which amounted to a lockout by the state and capital. Neighborhoods like Bushwick suffered horribly from the new fiscal and social conservatism. Local incomes fell, transportation and education deteriorated, youth crime increased, and landlords abandoned buildings rather than pay mortgages, taxes, and maintenance charges that outstripped acceptable levels of rental profit. In the 1960s and '70s, businesses and retail followed white ethnics and insurance companies out of the neighborhood, as Puerto Ricans continued to move in. Redlining – the name for the process whereby banks and insurance companies cut off lending – followed. As Bushwick declined, people with enough wealth or income to reside elsewhere left, and the arson-abandonment cycle took over.

In Bushwick, the critical period was the worldwide recession between 1973 and 1975, when financial institutions refused to continue lending the city money, ushering in a lasting period of neoliberal economic and social restructuring. Bushwick had begun to feel the effects of declining manufacturing in the latter half of the 1960s, and all three of its famed breweries – Rheingold, Schlitz, and Trommers – had closed by 1976, after the Rockefeller brothers filled in the port of lower Manhattan in order to build Battery Park City, a high-rise, government-subsidized luxury waterfront park and residential development. This cut off the supply of West Coast hops, which had been ferried into the port on the Manhattan Transfer.

The Rockefeller brothers required colossal government subsidies and direct state intervention on their behalf in order to extend the central business district to the West Side of Manhattan. As much as the consolidation of national brands such as Budweiser and Miller, the development of lower Manhattan for office towers and luxury housing – welfare for the rich – severed Bushwick's link to large-scale industrial production and cultural recognition.

Then, on July 13, 1977, the city was plunged into darkness after lightning struck a major transmission line near the Indian Point nuclear facility. By the time Con Edison restored power 24 hours later, raging fires had already engulfed Bushwick, and looting was widespread; it took police days to restore "order." In the wake of the blackout, one-third of local business closed, and a full 20 per cent of the housing stock was lost. Depicted as a natural disaster, the blackout serves as the starting point of most official stories of the decline, and subsequent rise, of Bushwick, but the urban deterioration that preceded and followed the blackout was a foreseeable result of disastrous public policies. The city's population decreased by more than 10 per cent from 1970 through 1980, and Bushwick's shrank to the lowest levels of the century. Meanwhile, for both males and females, Puerto Rican unemployment rates more than doubled in the 1970s, while poverty rates rose from 33 per cent to 42 per cent.

Soon after the riots of '77, Roger Starr joined the editorial board of the *New York*

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Times. Pathologizing a sector of poor black and Puerto Rican families as disorganized, welfare-addicted, shiftless, criminal, and drug-addicted, Starr aimed to discredit urban liberalism by diagnosing communities like the south Bronx as so sick that to help them with government programs would be cruel and unusual. Starr was an early advocate of quality-of-life policing, arguing that rigorous enforcement of minor violations in poor communities would reduce crime, improve quality of life, lead to more investment and job creation.

For Starr, and mayors from Koch through Giuliani, fighting crime became the rhetorical centerpiece of urban policy toward the poor. Fewer blacks and Puerto Ricans had been directly affected in earlier "slum clearance" campaigns connected to "urban renewal" during the 1950s and '60s, and public housing was built to rehouse some of the displaced. This is why the Rockefeller brothers and elites who followed their lead fell out with Robert Moses. In their estimation, Moses had built too much public housing, thereby slowing urban redevelopment and the restructuring of the economy away from transport and manufacturing. After Moses, housing construction for the poor was abandoned. Eventually, prisons were built instead.

Where planned shrinkage took place – the south and west Bronx, north Brooklyn, north Queens, upper Manhattan, the East Village and the Lower East Side – the drug trade took over as the motor of economic growth, job creation, and youth socialization in the 1980s. Bushwick was no exception. Both addicts and sellers were concentrated in these neighborhoods, where police had all but disappeared and jobs were scarce. Manufacturing jobs shrank from 538,000 in 1977 to 360,600 in 1989. Job growth was concentrated in securities, banking, legal services, management, consulting, accounting, entertainment, culture, tourism, and corporate law; ghetto youth need not apply. They could look forward to jobs as janitors, maintenance workers, non-unionized healthcare workers, security guards, and childcare workers; jobs that offered little security, no benefits, nor opportunities for upward mobility.

Unsurprisingly, young people became involved in street distribution of narcotics. For many, work in the narcotics industry offered the only hope for social mobility, structure, discipline, and socialization into the traditional "values" of capitalist enterprise: loyalty, dependability, hard work, and risk-taking initiative. For a generation increasingly enmeshed in the criminal justice system, networks forged in prison became a substitute for shredded social networks in neighborhoods.

Like much of the rest of Brooklyn and the Bronx, Bushwick witnessed the spread of a new epidemic, AIDS, and the return of an old one, TB, beginning in 1978. By the mid-1980s, Bushwick was one of the city's leaders in arson as well. Then crack took over, with open markets along Knickerbocker – known as "the well" because of the depth of its retail drug markets – on Troutman, Starr, Jefferson, and Putnam. Homeless shelters, meanwhile, opened in buildings owned by absentee landlords that rapidly changed hands until being set alight.

Prosecutors made crime, drugs, and welfare the new *lingua franca* of backlash politics. In 1986, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act stipulated 29 new offenses carrying mandatory minimums. The number of drug busts, along with the prison population, doubled between 1985 and 1990. New York City led the way, as drug arrests quadrupled between 1980 and 1988. More than a third of the NYPD's budget now went to anti-drug enforcement. In effect, as a consequence of its drug policy, and in lieu of building more public housing, the state engineered a large-scale relocation program: 80 per cent of all prisoners sent upstate between 1980 and 1990 came from seven neighborhoods in New York City. The number of people busted for drugs nearly doubled to 1.4 million per year between 1985 and 1989.

Starr: "Our urban system is based on the theory of taking the peasant and turning him into a proletarian. Why not keep him a peasant?"

With the conversion of Manhattan into a theme park city, and the planned transformation of Brooklyn into the "new Manhattan," urban poverty became the principal threat to redeveloping new areas in the new millennium. These zones had to be secured for redevelopment, plus the "new demographic" that developers brought in: the first wave of mostly white artists, musicians, filmmakers, and other members of the creative arts and culture industry.

Ironically, in Bushwick, as in Spanish Harlem, the historically unprecedented inflow of working-class immigrants from Latin America – whose labor power runs the city's service economy – has presented an unmovable structural barrier for would-be gentrifiers. From a century-long low point of 92,500 in 1980, Bushwick's population expanded to 102,600 by 1990, and to 104,400 by 2000, yet working-class immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean counted for almost the entirety of the inflow. The big wave of migration to the city as a whole was in the 1990s, but in Bushwick population growth was a mere 2 per cent in that decade, compared to 11 per cent in the 1980s. As in the previous decade, Dominicans were the largest group of migrants in the 1990s. But they were increasingly joined by people from small towns and countrysides of Meso- and Andean-America fleeing neoliberal agricultural policies that pitted *microfundios* against U.S.-government subsidized agribusiness.

Following the implosion in the Mexican countryside post-NAFTA, and the collapse of national industry and wages after the peso crisis in 1995, huge numbers of Mexicans – specifically Poblanos and Mixtecas – began to populating Bushwick after the mid-1990s. Since the 17th century, rural Ecuadorians have used migration to escape anti-indigenous racism and exploitation on haciendas. Ecuadorian migration to New York City has made it the country's third city after Quito and Guayaquil.

In Bushwick, two-thirds of first-generation Mexicans, Ecuadorians, and Dominicans do not enjoy – and, if pending immigration legislation passes, cannot look forward to – citizenship rights, a limbo which forces them to exploit themselves and their family members through endless work. Their children are their hope, and while the neighborhood's public school "performance" has improved steadily in recent years, given the current structure and sectoral composition of New York's economy, few first-generation Dominican, Ecuadorian, or Mexican immigrants in neighborhoods like Bushwick are likely to find educational and job opportunities that would allow for significant social mobility.

Puerto Ricans still represent the single largest ethnic-national group in the neighborhood, at 41 per cent. 35 per cent of Bushwick's total population is foreign-

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born. Blacks still make up nearly a quarter of the neighborhood population.

More than 40 per cent of Bushwick's population live on annual incomes that fall below the federally defined poverty line: $9,800 for an individual, $20,000 for a family of four. The median household income is roughly $24,000. Unemployment rates hover at 17 per cent, close to double the average in Brooklyn and the city as a whole, and for young people, unemployment is somewhere between 35 and 60 per cent. Those receiving public assistance, Supplemental Security Income, and/or Medicaid increased from 37 per cent in 2000 to 54 per cent in 2005. The "innate charm" referred to in the city's lifestyle magazines does not cover this part of the community. While the percentage of whites rose from 3 per cent to 4.5 percent between 2000 and 2005, this was hardly enough to offset the net loss of 45 per cent between 1990 and 2000. Would-be gentrifiers have their work cut out for them.

Thus Bushwick remains a poor, peripheral neighborhood, far from the central business district, the majority of whose residents are black and Hispanic living at subsistence levels. Nor does the neighborhood's "innate charm" include rubbing elbows, since there is little mixing – outside of places like the soon-to-be re-converted "restaurant" on the corner of Starr and Wyckoff, where the mixing was among Latin American men. In María Hernández Park, the neighborhood's largest public space located two blocks south of Starr and Wyckoff, one finds Ecuadorian volleyball games, Mexican soccer games, Puerto Rican and Dominican handball, and black and Puerto Rican youth basketball. Non-Hispanic whites are absent, except when jogging or walking their dogs. Restaurants, bodegas, and groceries are similarly segregated, while businesses along the neighborhood's retail strips – Broadway, Myrtle, and Knickerbocker – cater mainly to blacks, Puerto Ricans, and new immigrants, not white middle-class professionals. One local merchant, Eurides Echevarria, says of white newcomers: "[T]hey just come to sleep. They bring everything from the city. They don't spend. And they don't talk to anybody."

The newest migrant wave has local origins, originating in the already-gentrified neighborhoods to the west. In the mid-1990s, as New York City's real estate market began to pick up again after the doldrums of the early 1990s, a tiny population of young, mostly white, newcomers was pushed into Bushwick by rising rents on the Lower East Side and Williamsburg. People in the arts industry led the immigration. After performing to standard in Manhattan as first-wave gentrifiers, they were summoned to Brooklyn. Aspiring property owners, or so the theory went, would follow.

New York has become an example of what one urban theorist, Peter Marcuse, calls a "quartered city," rigidly divided along the lines of race, class, and/or ethnicity-nationality. Though the image of hard-working immigrants remains central to the city's mythology, after September 11 even those immigrants with formal citizenship – in Bushwick, one in three – are potentially subject to political persecution and police harassment, even deportation. Most immigrants, as well as their children, live in fear of the both soft and hard aspects of American state power.

Some combination of electoralism and mass collective action offers the only hope for improvement in housing, education, jobs, health care, and other services. Along Knickerbocker, Mexican, Ecuadorian, Dominican, Puerto Rican, and African American workers in the wholesale and retail sectors have been fighting for higher wages, health insurance, and the right to unionize. For illegal immigrants in manufacturing as well as services, unionization offers the only chance to earn minimum wage, while for Dominican, Puerto Rican, and African American packing workers, it holds out the possibility of wages in cash rather than in kind. To repeat: on Knickerbocker Ave., young black and Puerto Rican workers *with citizenship* are fighting to be paid a cash wage for packing jobs.

Signs are promising so far. Beginning in December 2004, Despierta Bushwick, a campaign combining direct action with consumer boycotts – led by Se Hace Camino al Andar/Make the Road by Walking, one of New York's largest, most militant community organizations – has helped Knickerbocker retail workers obtain hundreds of thousands of dollars in back pay. A $5 per hour minimum wage, without overtime pay, sick days, or vacations, along with rampant health and safety violations and unfair firings, are widespread, but it is possible to imagine the tide turning as the Restaurant, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (RWDSU) teams up with Se Hace Camino/Make the Road.

Sadly, though, the majority of the neighborhood's low-wage immigrant workers, under- and unemployed African Americans and Puerto Ricans do not belong to community or labor organizations. Immigrant workers, including dark-skinned Dominicans, are quick to repeat mantras about black and Puerto Rican shiftlessness. A significant number of neighborhood blacks used a xenophobic, nationalist rhetoric of citizenship in the face of immigrant demands on May 1, 2006. This attitude may stem from competition in housing and labor markets. Puerto Rican and Dominican friction is notorious, and young Mexicans in Brooklyn have formed gangs partly as a response to violence suffered at the hands of Puerto Ricans.

Community-labor struggles along the lines of the Despierta Bushwick campaign, along with visionary initiatives like Make the Road's Youth Power Program, will likely be the venue for the forging of new class solidarities. This indicates both the possibilities and the limits of multiethnic protest and mobilization from below — the only hope for a renaissance that would benefit Bushwick's working-class majority of blacks and Latinos. For that to happen, robust multiethnic community organizations would need a labor movement to match – at present, venerable progressive locals like SEIU's 1199 and 32BJ are conspicuous by their absence. As community organizers in Bushwick are quick to point out, financial

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dependence on liberal foundations dramatically limits the scope and autonomy of community organizing. Only organized labor can pool resources large enough to organize a politics of regional scale to challenge the city's planners, but they will have to work closely with organizations like Se Hace Camino/Make the Road if they are to attract new members from neighborhoods from which they have long been absent.

All the same, the discussion remains somewhat hypothetical, since Roger Starr's ideas remain dominant in the culture at large. Since the Communist Party was eliminated from the city's political life in the late 1940s, there has been no alternative vision of a different social order, and organized labor's power has steadily waned as capital has extended its command and control – not least on the ideological front.

In the absence of sustained mobilization of the sort U.S. cities witnessed in May 2006, electoralism remains the primary avenue for political participation. Latinos had begun to reconfigure city politics through the ballot by the mid-1990s, and participation in the 2005 mayoral race was equal to that of the presidential election in 2004. The New Americans' Exit Poll in 2005, carried out by the New York Immigration Coalition and Barnard's Lorraine Minnute, points to the potential for the re-construction of social democracy and participatory citizenship in the U.S.A. Unlike other groups, Latinos vote in the same numbers for state and local elections as they do in federal elections, and want better schools and hospitals, affordable housing and health care, safer workplaces, jobs with benefits and higher wages.

When a global history of the police terror that accompanied neoliberal structural adjustment is written, stories of neighborhoods like Bushwick in Brooklyn will have to be included alongside Rocinha in Rio or Manrique in Medellín . As in the great industrial cities of the global south, during the 1980s and '90s, in Brooklyn shrinking opportunities for industrial jobs coincided with record numbers of migrants. Even as cities ceased to be job machines pulling in streams of peasants, neoliberal policies pushed them out of the countryside and into cities where they were free to invent jobs or starve: a new form of urban sharecropping.

Young black and Puerto Rican workers with citizenship are fighting to be paid a cash wage for packing jobs.

Contemporary capitalism produces a steadily increasing number of people living at or below subsistence levels, a large surplus population that can in no way be confused with Marx's "reserve army of labor" – industrial wage laborers hired and fired according to the rhythms of the business cycle. Since they are not considered necessary to the process of value creation and accumulation, they are mostly poor, under- and unemployed, and frequently desperate, which makes them subject to intense police, judicial, and carceral repression.

In New York City, "surplus humanity" has been black and Puerto Rican, for no productive function other than the low-wage service work has been allotted to them since the 1970s. In the 1980s, violence, addiction, unemployment and underemployment, unsafe housing, high levels of crime, arson, infectious disease, and personal insecurity resulted. As the Wallaces argue, "Before the burnout, when the communities were far more structured, families were poor but not abject and not simply straws on the tide of urban waves of destruction".

More abstractly, before the disaster, democracy had been linked to redistribution, equality, an expanding public sphere, and freedom understood as the welfare of the collective. Wealth was not an end in itself, and came with social responsibility. I have sought here to explain the magnitude of reversal, and to contribute, however modestly, to efforts underway to re-make the neighborhood in the image of its inhabitants and *their* aspirations, as opposed to those purveyed by city's lifestyle magazines and the interests they represent. The latter produce, and are produced by, a brutal amnesia regarding the city's recent history, which remains a *secreto a voces*. CP

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